DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.11136/jqh.1311.02.02

CONTINUITY, CONTEXT, AND COHERENCE IN THE QUR'ĀN: A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE IDEA OF *NAẒM* IN *TAFSĪR* LITERATURE

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Abstract

This paper looks at several works of tafsīr *that identify* naẓm*, or coherence, as a significant feature of the Qur'ān. The authors whose works are examined are Ṭabarī, Rāzī, Biqā'ī, and Farāhī and Iṣlāḥī—the last two, teacher and student, discussed together. It is concluded that modern* tafsīr*, compared with traditional* tafsīr*, is more accepting of the idea of* naẓm *in the Qur'ān, and that the Farāhī-Islāḥī view of Qur'anic* naẓm *is more plausible than the views of the other exegetes studied.*

Keywords: *Qur'ān, tafsīr, naẓm.*

Introduction

I will begin by explaining the senses in which I use the three keywords in the paper's main title—continuity, context, and coherence: by continuity I mean linkage between some or all the verses of a *sūrah*; by context I mean a framework of meaning which is typically created by a set of verses seen to form a cluster and which helps to determine the meaning of one or more verses occurring inside or in the vicinity of that cluster; and by coherence I mean overall, or organic, unity or coherence in a *sūrah*. I would like to make three points in regard to this explanation. First, it is not offered as the only possible explanation of the three terms; it is a working description intended to lay the groundwork for discussion in this paper, and will undergo qualification later in the paper. Second, the explanation suggests a certain gradation in terms of complexity, starting, at the basic level, with continuity and ending, at the highest level, with coherence, with context making up the middle. Third, the three

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Published by Department of al-Qur'ān and al-Hadith, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur - Malaysia.

keywords can be said to come under the umbrella of the Arabic word *naẓm*, which, along with its derivatives, is inclusive of them, as a few quick examples from Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān al-ʿArab* will show: *naẓamtu ʾl-luʾlua: jamaʿtuhū fī l-silki*, "I strung [literally, collected] the pearls on a string"; *tanāẓamati ʾl-ṣukhūru: talāṣaqat*, "the boulders cling to, or lie next to, or are contiguous to, each other"); *al-naẓīmu mina ʾl-rukiyyi: mā tanāsaqa fuquruhū* [or *fiqaruhū*, according to *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*[1]] *ʿalā nasaqin wāḥidin*,[2] "the word *naẓīm* is used for a set of wells that have a uniform layout *or* have been well arranged," that is, wells that have been dug methodically or according to a plan. Taken together, these examples clearly denote continuity and coherence. But the idea of context can also be derived from them, since context presupposes continuity and is itself presupposed in coherence.I will, therefore, use *naẓm* as the mother term for the three keywords, referring sometimes to one, and sometimes to more than one, of them.

We are now ready to inquire how the idea of *naẓm*—in the senses of continuity, context, and coherence—is found in *tafsīr* literature. The review, a selective one, covers the works of the following authors.

1. Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224–310/839–923).
2. Fakhr al-Dīn Abū ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿUmar al-Rāzī (544–606/1150–1210).
3. Abū ʾl–Ḥasan Ibrāhīm ibn ʿUmar al-Biqāʿī (809–885/1406–1480)
4. Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī (1863–1930).
5. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī (1906–1997).

The last two authors will be discussed together.

A prefatory remark about one of the key terms in the title is in order. I think it goes without saying that none of the authors on our list—and none on any other possible list—would deny, at least

[1] Majd al-Dīn Muḥammad ibnYaʿqūb al-Fayrūzābādī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), 1048: *n-ẓ-m*.

[2] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 18 vols. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1988), 14:196–197: *n-ẓ-m*.

theoretically, the existence or significance of *naẓm*-as-context in the Qur'ān. As such, evidence is hardly needed to prove that, in one way or another, all our authors would invoke context to interpret, or accord preference to a certain interpretation of, this or that Qur'anic verse. I will have more to say about context later on. For now, I will focus on continuity and coherence.

Ṭabarī

Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*[3] typifies the so-called tradition-based exegesis (*tafsīr bi 'l-ma'thūr*). Following his standard exegetical procedure, Ṭabarī introduces a Qur'anic verse with the phrase *al-qawlu fī ta'wīli qawlihī ta'ālā*, then offers his understanding of the meaning of the verse, and follows this up with a series of reports, or *riwāyāt*, prefaced with the phrase, *wa-bi-naḥwi 'lladhī qulnā qāla ahlu 'l-ta'wīli; dhikru man qāla dhālika*. In his exegetical explanations, Ṭabarī indicates his support or preference for one *riwāya*-based explanation of the verse over against another, but it is obvious that he is not interested in discovering *naẓm*-as-continuity or *naẓm*-as-coherence in the Qur'anic text. Occasionally, he seeks to link verses with one another, but, first, his motivation for doing so is not a concern to find any *naẓm*-relationship between verses—for, if that were the case, he would be doing so routinely or more frequently—and, second, the link that he happens to establish between verses hardly has much substance. To take an example: Q 2:30–39 tells the story of God's installation of Adam as *khalīfah* on earth. The passage begins with the words *wa-idh qāla rabbuka*, "And when your Lord said." Ṭabarī says that, according to a certain Basran scholar,[4] the particle *idh*, "when," in this verse is redundant and, therefore, dispensable or omissible (*anna idh mina 'l-ḥurūfi 'l-zawā'idi wa-anna ma'nāhā 'l-ḥadhfu*. Ṭabarī rejects this view, arguing that the particle *idh* in the verse does have a meaning–it indicates an unknown time: *wa-yadullu 'alā majhūlin mina 'l-waqti*. But then Ṭabarī faces a problem: granted that the *idh* is not without meaning, why has it been used in this particular verse, since there is nothing in the preceding verses to which it may be joined by conjunction?

[3] Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 30 vols. in 12 (Egypt: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Awlāduhū, 1954).

[4] He is Abū 'Ubayda Ma'mar ibn al-Muthannā (728–825).

Ṭabarī answers that, in a preceding verse (28), in which God reminds the Israelites of his blessings upon them—*kayfa takfurūna bi 'llāhi wa-kuntum amwātan fa-aḥyākum thumma yumītukum thumma yuḥyīkum thumma ilayhi turja'ūna*—the meaning of *udhkurū* is embedded, and that the same meaning is indicated by the particle *idh* in *idha qāla rabbuka* in verse 30, so that the meaning of *udhkurū*, directly or indirectly present in both verses, 28 and 30, links the two verses, God thus saying: Remember my blessings upon you and remember when I said to the angels, "I am going to install a caliph on earth."[5] It is not difficult to see that this linkage between the two verses (28 and 30) is a purely grammatical one and has nothing to do with the actual content of the verses involved.

Rāzī

Rāzī is probably the first major *mufassir* to make a relatively systematic attempt to find *naẓm* in the Qur'ān. He declares that most of the subtleties of the Qur'ān are lodged in the links and relationships between the Qur'anic verses: *aktharu laṭā'ifi 'l-Qur'āni mūda'atun fi 'l-tartībāti wa-'l-rawābiṭi.*[6] In his *tafsīr*, known as *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (or *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb)*,[7] Rāzī frequently investigates the relationships between the Qur'anic verses as they follow one another, introducing his discussion of such relationships with several more or less fixed phrases, which, in variant forms, include terms like *ittiṣāl*, *ta'alluq*, and *naẓm*. For example:

> *i'lam anna 'ttiṣāla hādhihī 'l-āyati bi-mā qablahā*
>
> *fi kayfiyyati ta'alluqi hādhihī 'l-āyati bi-mā qablahā*[8]

or

> *i'lam anna hādhā muta'alliqun bi-mā taqaddama*

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5 Ṭabarī, 1:153–154.

6 In Badr al-Dīn Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn Bahādur al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fi 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān,* 4 vols. in 2, ed. Muḥammad Abū 'l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah), 1:36.

7 Fakhr al-Dīn Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 32 vols. in 16 ([Iran]: Maktab al-I'lām al-Islāmī, 1413 H).

8 Ibid., 2:18, at Q 2:2; 9:34, at Q 3:152.

min qawlihī

fī kayfiyyati 'l-naẓmi wajhāni[9]

or

anna fī 'l-naẓmi wujūhan[10]

At times Rāzī seems to be searching for patterns of thought or arrangement in the Qur'anic presentation. Thus, some verses may serve as a *muqaddimah* to the verses that follow;[11] it is the Qur'ān's practice (*ʿāda*) to follow up *waʿīd* ("threat") with *waʿd* ("promise");[12] and after adducing arguments in support of a certain claim it has made, the Qur'ān quotes and then replies to objections raised against its claim.[13] In general, Rāzī tries to see the verses or passages of a *sūrah* as connected from the *sūrah*'s beginning to its end. At times, he states his belief in the unity of a *sūrah* quite emphatically. In his commentary on Q 41:44 (*wa-law jaʿalnāhu Qur'ānan aʿjamiyyan la-qālū law lā fuṣṣilat āyātuhū a-aʿjamiyyun wa-ʿarabiyyun . . .*), he rejects the view that this verse was revealed in response to the objection made by some, namely, Why was the Qur'ān not revealed in a language other than Arabic (*law lā nuzzila 'l-Qur'ānu bi-lughti 'l-ʿAjami*[14]). To cite such a *sabab al-nuzūl* for this verse is, Rāzī says, to commit a great wrong against the Qur'ān (*ḥayfun ʿazīmun ʿalā 'l-Qur'āni*), for it implies that the Qur'ān contains irrelevant verses, and if this indeed were the case, then how could one claim the Qur'ān to be a well-ordered book (*kitāban muntaẓaman*), not to speak of claiming inimitability for it (*faḍlan ʿan iddiʿā'i kawnihī muʿjizan*)? He then remarks that this verse, like the other verses in the *sūrah*, are tied to verse 5 of the *sūrah.* Rāzī concludes by saying:

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9 Ibid., 2:33, at Q 2:5; 9:22, at Q 3:145; 9:83, at Q 166-167.

10 Ibid., 9:9, at Q 3:135; 9:116, at Q 3:181–182; 9:43, at Q 3:154; 9:77, at Q 3:164; 9:129, at Q 3:187.

11 For example, Q 3:137–138, which are a *muqaddimah* to Q 3:139). Ibid., 9:13, at Q 3:137–138.

12 For example, ibid., 2:122, at Q 2:25.

13 Ibid., 2:131, at Q 2:26.

14 Reading *law lā nuzzila* instead of *law nuzzila* or *nazala*. Cf. *law lā unzila hādhā 'l-Qur'ānu . . .*, in Ṭabarī, 24:80, and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, 6 vols. (Beirut: Muḥammad Amīn Damj, 1972), 5:367.

(*wa-qālū qulūbunā fī akinnatin mimmā tadʿūnā ilayhi* . . .).[15]

Anyone who considers the matter with fairness, shunning arbitrariness, will realize that, if we interpret this verse the way we have, the whole *sūrah* will become, from beginning to end, a single, well-ordered discourse, moving toward a single goal, and so this interpretation is preferable to the one they have presented.

Rāzī's own words are as follows:

> Wa-kullu man anṣafa wa-lam yataʿassaf ʿalima annā idhā fassarnā hādhihī ʾl-āyata ʿalā ʾl-wajhi ʾlladhī dhakarnā ṣārat hādhihī ʾl-sūratu min awwalihā ilā ākhirihā kalāman wāḥidan muntaẓaman masūqan naḥwa gharaḍin wāḥidin fa-yakūnu hādha ʾl-tafsīru awlā mimmā dhakarūhu.[16]

Time and again, Rāzī exclaims how apt or beautiful such and such an arrangement of Qur'anic verses in a given place is; for example: *wa-man anṣafa ʿalima anna hādhā tartībun ḥasanun fī ʾl-kalāmi.*[17]

Rāzī's approach to *naẓm* in the Qur'ān calls for a few observations. First, Rāzī views Qur'anic *naẓm* essentially in terms of linear connection: his goal is to show that the verses of a *sūrah* are marked by continuity. He links up the individual verses or passages of a *sūrah* as he goes through the *sūrah*, although sometimes, as we saw in the case of *sūrah* 41, he explains the connectedness of a *sūrah* with reference to a principal idea in the *sūrah*. Second, on occasion, but not as a rule, Rāzī invokes Qur'anic *naẓm* as a determinant of interpretation, as we saw in his commentary on Q 41:44. In Q 2:213 (*kāna ʾl-nāsu ummatan wāḥidatan fa-baʿatha ʾllāhu ʾl-nabiyyīna mubashshirīn wa-mundhirīna* . . .), he interprets the word *al-nās* to mean, specifically, those who had believed in Moses, the definite article in *al-nās* being for *ʿahd*, or prior knowledge, not for *istighrāq*, or thoroughgoing inclusion. Rāzī caps off his interpretation by saying: "And this view agrees with the verse's *naẓm* and accords with what precedes the verse and what follows it" (*wa-hādhā ʾl-qawlu muṭābiqun li-naẓmi*

[15] Rāzī, 27:133, at Q 41:44.
[16] Ibid., 27:134, at Q 41:44.
[17] Ibid., 9:61, at Q 3:159.

'l-āyati wa-muwāfiqun li-mā qablahā wa-li-mā ba'dahā).[18] Also, as in the case of Q 41:44, so in some other cases, Rāzī rejects a verse's alleged *sabab al-nuzūl* if, in his view, it is in conflict with a *naẓm*-based interpretation of that verse. Third, it would be correct to say that the focus of Rāzī's *naẓm*-based approach to the Qur'ān is the verses of a *sūrah*, although in some cases he tries to establish *naẓm*-relationships between *sūrah*s as well, by linking up the closing verses of one *sūrah* and the opening verses of the next.

Biqā'ī

Qur'anic *naẓm* constitutes a leitmotif in Biqā'ī's Qur'anic commentary *Naẓm al-Durar fi Tanāsub al-Āyāti wa-'l-Suwar*.[19] Biqā'ī aims to bring out the relationships informing the sequence of the verses in the Qur'anic *sūrah*s as well as of the sūras in the received arrangement of the Qur'ān (*munāsabāt tartīb al-suwar wa-'l-āyāt*).[20] He quotes his *shaykh*, Abū'l-Faḍl ibn 'Abdallāh, who laid down "the fundamental principle for understanding the *munāsabāt* of the Qur'anic verses." The principle, as explained by the *shaykh*, consists in taking the following into consideration: first, the purpose for which a *sūrah* has been revealed (*al-gharaḍu 'lladhī sīqat lahū 'l-sūratu*); second, the propaedeutics called for by that purpose (*mā yaḥtāju ilayhi dhālika 'l-gharaḍu mina 'l-muqaddimāti*), and the varying levels of those propaedeutics in so far as they stand in proximity to or at a remove from the purpose in question (*fī marātibi tilka 'l-muqaddimāti fī 'l-qurbi wa-'l-bu'di mina 'l-maṭlūbi*); and, third, with discussion of the propaedeutics under way, what that purpose calls for next in terms of the need for the listener to consider the rules and corollaries that follow logically and are necessitated by *balāghah* (*mā yastatbi'uhū min istishrāfi nafsi 'l-sāmi'i ilā 'l-aḥkāmi wa-'l-lawāzimi 'l-tābi'ati lahū 'llatī taqtaḍī 'l-balāghatu*). Abū 'l-Faḍl, concludes: "This, then, is the general principle that controls the process of establishing connections between all parts of the Qur'ān (*al-amru 'l-kulliyyu 'l-muhayminu 'alā ḥukmi 'l-rabṭi bayna jamī'i ajzā'i 'l-Qur'āni*), and when you put it into practice, you will, God

[18] Ibid., 6:14–15, at Q 2:213.

[19] Abū 'l-Ḥasan Ibrāhīm ibn 'Umar al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-Durar*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003).

[20] Ibid., 1:3.

willing, clearly see the nature of *naẓm* in detail—between one verse and another and between one *sūrah* and another."[21]

In commenting on the opening *sūrah* of the Qur'ān, *al-Fātiḥah*, Biqā'ī says that the *gharaḍ* of the *sūrah* is to affirm that praise of all kinds is due to God, who ought to be qualified with all the attributes of perfection (*ithbātu istiḥqāqi 'llāhi ta'āla li-jamī'i 'l-maḥāmid wa-ṣifāti 'l-kamāli*), that He alone is the owner and possessor of this world and the next (*ikhtiṣāṣihī bi-milki 'l-dunyā wa-'l-ākhirati*), and that He alone is worthy of being worshiped and petitioned for help (*wa-bi 'stiḥqāqi 'l-'ibādati wa-'l-isti'ānati*), being the only one worthy of being petitioned for the favor of guiding people to the path of those who will succeed and of rescuing them from the path of those who will suffer perdition (*bi-'l-su'āli fī 'l-manni bi-ilzāmi ṣirāti 'l-fā'izīna wa-'l-inqādhi min ṭarīqi 'l-hālikīna mukhtaṣṣan bi-dhālika kullihī*). All of this hinges on, says Biqā'ī, on people worshiping, out of fear and awe, God alone (*wa-madāru dhālika kullihī murāqabatu 'l-'ibādi li-rabbihim li-ifrādihī bi 'l-'ibādati*), and this is, according to Biqā'ī, what the *sūrah* aims to bring into relief.[22]

Biqā'ī's theoretical statement about determining the *naẓm* of a *sūrah* through identification of the *sūrah*'s *gharaḍ* raises hopes that are only marginally fulfilled in his *tafsīr*. As can be seen from his comments on *Fātiḥah*, his statement of the *sūrah*'s *gharaḍ* lacks specificity, amounting as it does to a summary or paraphrase of the entire *sūrah*. After discussing the *sūrah*'s *gharaḍ*, Biqā'ī explains the *sūrah*'s verses by breaking each verse down into shorter pieces—words and phrases—and then tries to point out the connections between these pieces. A certain adhocism informs his approach, however: instead of taking a synoptic view of the *sūrah*'s verses and linking them up in light of the *sūrah*'s *gharaḍ*, Biqā'ī connects any two verse segments as if in isolation from the rest of the *sūrah*'s verses.

Similarly, Biqā'ī's attempt to discover *naẓm* in the sequence of the *sūrah*s yields mixed results. He says, rightly, that the opening *sūrah*, *Fātiḥah*, is connected with the following *sūrah*, *Baqarah*, through the notion of *huda*, "guidance": in *Fātiḥah*, one prays for guidance—

[21] Ibid., 1:11.

[22] Ibid., 1:12.

ihdinā 'l-sirāṭa 'l-mustaqīma—(Q 1:6), and *Baqarah* opens with the statement that the Qur'ān is a guidance for the righteous—*hudan li 'l-muttaqīna* (Q 2:2). But this is a verbal, not a substantive, connection. One of the strangest ways in which Biqā'ī establishes *naẓm* connections is by reference to the linguistic properties of the Arabic alphabetical characters. His view of the relationship between *sūrah*s 19, *Maryam* and 20, *Ṭāhā*, is an example. According to him, the last part of *sūrah* 19 suggests the possibility that Muḥammad may not come to have a large enough following, but *sūrah* 20 says that the exact opposite will happen, as is borne out, says Biqā'ī, by the wide span between the points of articulation of the two broken letters opening the *sūrah*—the head of the tongue (*ra's al-lisān*) in the case of the first letter, *ta'*, and the deepest part of the throat (*aqṣā'l-ḥalq*) in the case of the second letter, *ha'*.[23]

Biqā'ī claims to have broken new ground in the field of Qur'anic *munāsabāt* or *naẓm*: he has written a *tafsīr*, he says, "in an area in which I have not seen anyone having preceded me" (*fī fannin mā ra'aytu man sabaqanī ilayhi*).[24] This claim is a little surprising since he quotes Zarkashī's treatment of the issue of *naẓm*, which includes a clear reference to Rāzī as one who has dealt with Qur'anic *naẓm* extensively.[25]

Farāhī and Iṣlāḥī

Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī was an Indian Muslim scholar of the Qur'ān. An author of many books in Arabic, his principal contribution to Qur'anic studies consists in his theory of Qur'anic *naẓm*. Farāhī enunciated a series of principles concerning Qur'anic *naẓm* and wrote a commentary on a number of Qur'anic *sūrah*s. His student, Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, who later moved to Pakistan, also made the Qur'ān the focus of his work. He developed Farāhī's exegetical principles and applied them to the entire Qur'ān, producing a nine-volume Qur'anic commentary, *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*,[26] in Urdu.

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[23] Ibid., 5:3, at Q 20:1.

[24] Ibid., 1:3.

[25] Ibid., 1:5-6.

[26] Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*, 9 vols. (Lahore: Fārān Foundation, 2000).

Farāhī is the first Qur'anic exegete to have offered a detailed theoretical argument in support of the view that the Qur'ān is marked by thematic and structural *naẓm*. He quotes Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (1445–1505) to the effect that very few exegetes have dealt with this subject because of its subtle, and, therefore, challenging nature.[27] Farāhī offers his own interpretation of the exegetes' general indifference to *naẓm* in the Qur'ān. He says that the exegetes did recognize the existence of *naẓm* in some parts of the Qur'ān but, failing to discover *naẓm* in all of the Qur'ān, and reluctant, therefore, to declare that the Qur'ān possesses *naẓm* in some parts but not in others, and, thus, wishing to hold a consistent view about the Qur'ān, thought it expedient to deny the existence of *naẓm* in the Qur'ān altogether.[28] Farāhī also sees significance in the fact that the compilatory order of the Qur'ān is different from its revelatory order: Muḥammad used to arrange the Qur'anic verses and chapters in an order very different from that in which they were revealed to him, and this new order, as the reports indicate, was governed by considerations of *naẓm*. After all, asks Farāhī, if we were to assume that the Qur'ān is devoid of *naẓm*, then the Qur'anic stricture against poets (Q 26:225), namely, *a-lam tara annahum fī kulli wādin yahīmūna*, "Have you not seen that they roam about in every valley," would apply to the Qur'ān, too, for this roaming about—*hayamān*—is obviously so called by the Qur'ān because it lacks direction, purpose, or plan (*hali 'l-hayamānu fī kulli wādin illa 'l-jarayānu fī 'l-qawli min ghayri maqṣidin wa-niẓāmin*).[29]

Farāhī then discusses the notion of *naẓm* within a *sūrah* and *naẓm* between *sūrah*s. Key to finding *naẓm* within a *sūrah* is the concept of *'amūd*, or central idea. Every *sūrah* of the Qur'ān revolves around an *'amūd*, and all the verses of a *sūrah* are organically linked to it, representing, in light of that *'amūd*, a systematic unfolding of the contents of that *sūrah* from its beginning to its end. Farāhī's *Tafsīr Niẓām al-Qur'ān* contains an exegesis of fourteen relatively short

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27 Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī, *Tafsīr Niẓām al-Qur'ān* (Azam Garh, Uttar Pradesh, India: al-Dā'irah al-Ḥamīdiyya, 2008), 16.

28 Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī, *Dalā'il al-Niẓām*, in *Rasā'il al-Imām al-Farāhī*, First Series, 3rd printing (Azam Garh, Uttar Pradesh, India: al-Dā'irah al-Ḥamīdiyyah, 2005), 35.

29 Ibid., 33.

*sūrah*s: 1 (*Fātiḥah*), 51 (*Dhāriyāt*), 66 (*Taḥrīm*), 75 (*Qiyāmah*), 77 (*Mursalāt*), 80 (*'Abasa*), 91 (*Shams*), 95 (*Tīn*), 103 (*'Asr*), 105 (*Fīl*), 108 (*Kawthar*), 109 (*Kāfirūn*), 111 (*Lahab*), and 112 (*Ikhlāṣ*).We will take a brief look at Farāhī's treatment of *sūrah* 51.

According to Farāhī, the *sūrah*'s *'amūd* is affirmation of the meting out of recompense in the hereafter (*ithbāt al-jazā'*), the *'amūd* of the preceding *sūrah*, 50 (*Qāf*), being affirmation of resurrection (*ithbāt al-ba'th*).[30] This *'amūd* is developed in the seven sections into which Farāhī divides the *sūrah*'s verses, namely: verses 1–14, 15–19, 20–23, 24–37, 38–46, 47–51, and 52–60. The first section draws attention to the fact that such phenomena of nature as winds and rains are at times beneficial and at times harmful. As such, they point to, and may be called analogues of, reward and punishment in the afterlife, the first section referring to punishment, with the next section speaking of reward, in the hereafter. The third section supports the reward-and-punishment thesis by citing, as evidence, natural phenomena and human life. The sixth section connects the important theme of the hereafter with two other fundamental themes in the Qur'ān, namely, monotheism and prophecy. The concluding section offers solace to the Prophet, telling him that his opponents will suffer the consequences of their disbelief. As can be seen, the *sūrah*'s *'amūd*, as stated by Farāhī, knits the whole *sūrah* into a unity, and is itself developed quite logically, addressing, in the last section, the actual situation obtaining in Mecca in which the *sūrah* was revealed.[31]

As mentioned above, Iṣlāḥī applies, with additions and modifications, Farāhī's methodology to the whole of the Qur'ān, producing a complete Qur'anic *tafsīr*. He identifies the *'amūd* of each *sūrah*, usually in quite precise terms. In addition, he establishes, within the received version of the Qur'ān, what he calls *sūrah*-pairs. He maintains that, as a rule, the *sūrah*s exist in pairs, *sūrah*s 2 and 3, 4 and 5, 6 and 7, and 8 and 9, for example, each forming a pair whose member *sūrah*s have complementary *'amūd*s. Furthermore—and, again, within the received sequence of the Qur'anic *sūrah*s—the 114

[30] Farāhī, *Tafsīr Niẓām al-Qur'ān,* 119.

[31] Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an* (Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications, 1986), 39–41.

*sūrah*s of the Qur'ān exist as seven groups (as opposed to Farāhī's nine groups), each group comprising one or more Meccan and Medinan *sūrah*s, with each type forming a solid bloc—the Meccan preceding the Medinan—and each *sūrah* in a group possessing an *ʿamūd* that deals with one aspect of the group's master *ʿamūd*.[32] The key notion in Iṣlāḥī's scheme, as in Farāhī's, is that of the *ʿamūd* of a *sūrah*, and, in another study, I hope to demonstrate, with reference to the longest *sūrah* of the Qur'ān, *Baqarah*, how Iṣlāḥī presents, in light of that *sūrah*'s *ʿamūd*, a strong case for organic unity in the Qur'anic *sūrah*s.

While the subject of Qur'anic *naẓm* needs to be discussed in much greater details before it will yield more definitive results, it is not difficult to see that, within the compass of this paper and on the basis of prima facie evidence, the Farāhī-Iṣlāḥī view of Qur'anic *naẓm* is more rigorous and systematic than any other author's view of Qur'anic *naẓm*.

Conclusions

1. In this paper, I have confined my discussion of Qur'anic *naẓm* to works of *tafsīr*, but treatments of *naẓm* in the Qur'ān are found in extra-exegetical works as well. A number of writers on *balāghah*, such as Abū Sulaymān Ḥamd ibn Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī (319–388/931–998), Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillanī (338–403/950–1013), and Abū Bakr ʿAbd al-Qāhir ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078), have also dealt with the subject, but their understanding of *naẓm* in the Qur'ān usually does not go beyond the notion of ideal relationship between words and meanings.[33]
2. Historically, there has been a difference of opinion on the issue of the presence of *naẓm* in the Qur'ān. According to the majority view, reported by Zarkashī,[34] *naẓm* is not part of the "design" of the Qur'ān, since the Qur'ān, revealed in installments over a period of twenty odd years, and its verses

[32] For details, see ibid.
[33] Ibid., 11-16.
[34] Zarkashī, 1:37.

occasioned by a variety of factors and dealing with a variety of injunctions, could not be expected to possess *naẓm* in any significant degree (1:37). According to the minority view, the Qur'ān is possessed of *naẓm*, significant in a limited sense.[35] Our review of the *tafāsīr* of selected writers has shown that those who believe that the Qur'ān possesses *naẓm* have understood Qur'anic *naẓm* to have taken one or more of the following forms: *naẓm* as continuity, *naẓm* as context, and *naẓm* as coherence.

3. If we divide *tafsīr* works into two categories, traditional and modern, defining, roughly, traditional works as those produced from early Islamic times to the end of the nineteenth century and modern works as those that have come into existence since the beginning of the twentieth century, we will clearly see that the idea of Qur'anic *naẓm* has a notable presence in a few of the traditional works, but does not necessarily register a steady linear progress in the overall history of Qur'anic exegesis. We will also notice that the notion of *sūrah* as a unity becomes increasingly important in the twentieth century, until it becomes a distinctive feature of modern Qur'anic exegesis. Not only has the idea of Qur'anic *naẓm* made notable gains intwentieth-century Qur'anic exegetical thought, it is likely to become a fundamental premise for study of the Qur'ān in the future. A number of Qur'anic exegetes and scholars in various parts of the Muslim world have approached the Qur'ān with this premise of *naẓm* in mind. A few names are 'Izzat Darwazah, author of *Al-Tafsīr al-Ḥadīth*, Sayyid Quṭb, author of *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*, Ashrāf 'Alī Thānavī, author of the Urdu *Bayān al-Qur'ān*, Abū 'l-A'lā Mawdūdī, author of *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, and Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabātabā'ī, author of *Al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*.[36] What we have called above the minority view is likely eventually to become the majority view, making modern *tafsīr* different

[35] Ibid., 1:36.

[36] For details, see Mustansir Mir, "The *sūra* as a unity: a twentieth-century development in Qur'ān exegesis," in G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shereef, eds., *Approaches to the Qur'ān* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 211–224.

from traditional *tafsīr* in a fundamental respect. Whether this shift in Qur'anic exegetical thought will grow to become, or will contribute along with other changes to the creation of, a sort of paradigm shift in Qur'anic exegesis will depend on how the idea is developed, and with what results. We saw that Rāzī rejects a certain *sabab al-nuzūl* on the grounds that it undermines Qur'anic *naẓm*, and it would not be wrong to say that there is a certain lack of affinity between Qur'anic *naẓm* and *sabab al-nuzūl*. Already in modern *tafsīr*, there is much less reliance on *sabab al-nuzūl* as a determinant of exegesis, and this trend is likely to grow in the future.

4. The interest taken by modern exegetes in Qur'anic *naẓm* can be termed part of a general interest taken by Muslim scholars today in coming to terms with the Qur'ān afresh. This general interest is largely due to the particular sociocultural setting of the Muslim world in modern times. After centuries of stagnation and decadence, on the one hand, and the long, and still continuing, struggle both against the neocolonial domination of Muslim lands and against the self-doubting, obsequious Muslim mindset engendered under colonialism, on the other hand, the Muslims are going through a period of soul-searching under the twin impact of Western thought and culture and Muslim reformist thought. A significant feature of this soul-searching is scrutiny and evaluation of the traditional intellectual and spiritual heritage of Muslims, and, in this project of critical assessment, the Qur'ān, the one constant and irreducible source of knowledge and inspiration for Muslims, is playing an increasingly important role as judge and arbiter of meaning. Conscious that the traditional ways of interpreting the Qur'ān come laden with historical baggage of various kinds, many modern Muslim scholars in modern times attach diminished importance to several traditionally important exegetical sources and have chosen to focus on the Qur'anic text itself, studying it with a view to finding answers and solutions to questions and issues of today. In doing so, they tend to accord primacy to the Qur'anic text itself over the traditional repertoire of sources and devices for understanding that text. Viewed against this

changed backdrop, a *naẓm*-based approach to the Qur'ān, with its prospects of a more meaningful interpretation of the Qur'ān, would seem to carry great appeal for Muslim exegetes.